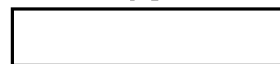


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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Castro and His Critics

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CASTRO AND HIS CRITICS

For a man who so thoroughly enjoys being the critic, Fidel Castro has exhibited a strong inability to accept criticism. Indeed, the more accurate the criticism, the more outraged his reaction is likely to be. The failure of his campaign to produce ten million tons of sugar in the 1970 harvest, and the host of other production reverses that accompanied the campaign, however, seem to have improved somewhat his receptivity to expert advice, but not his ability to accept it gracefully.

Although on several occasions he has vehemently denounced such well-intentioned and pro-Cuban analysts as Rene Dumont and K. S. Karol, Castro has initiated in the past year many political and administrative changes that can be traced directly to their sound critiques. His initiatives, however, are halfway measures that fall far short of the fundamental reorientation so vital to the country's needs. His move to reinstitute material incentives, for example, was limited and has proved relatively ineffective in reducing absenteeism and improving labor productivity. As a result, negative measures such as the "antivagrancy" law have been adopted and a definite trend toward more repression is evident. In addition, the militarization of Cuban society that both Karol and Dumont found so distasteful is continuing, albeit under some rather thin camouflage, and the well-publicized steps toward "democratization" have failed to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, Castro retains his much-criticized penchant for playing the role of "supermanager," making all key decisions and many minor ones, and involving himself in details and minutiae unworthy of his position. His disruptive influence on the economy is therefore likely to continue unless he can develop confidence in and delegate authority to others more competent than he.

For their part, the Cuban people seem to have developed a lethargy born of countless unfulfilled promises and years of stupifying rhetoric. Although dissatisfied with their present state, they have too much respect for the security forces to organize actively against the government. Nonetheless, their growing cynicism in the face of increased economic hardships makes it more difficult than ever for Castro to inspire the popular enthusiasm needed to revitalize the revolution and elicit the continued sacrifices required to make the government's economic programs work. The revolution seems to have run out of steam, and Castro is hard pressed to keep it in motion.

Background

Rene Dumont, an aging French agronomist noted particularly in the underdeveloped world as an expert in agricultural planning, first went to Cuba in May 1960 to study the Cuban revolution

and "to put myself at its service." He returned later that year at Fidel Castro's request, and made visits in September 1963 and June 1969, again upon invitation. His book, *Cuba: Socialism and Development*, was published in 1964, based on data gathered during his first three trips. It was an

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attempt to catalog the unexpected problems encountered by the Castro government in its head-long rush toward development via socialism, so that other underdeveloped countries choosing the same path might profit from the Cuban experience. His second book, *Cuba: Is It Socialist?*, was published in early 1970 and was born of Dumont's frustration and disappointment with Cuba's lack of political and economic progress in spite of a decade of sacrifice by its people.

K. S. Karol, a 47-year-old Polish-born journalist who finally settled in Paris after being in prison in the USSR, has visited Cuba four times: twice in 1961, and once in 1967 and again in 1968. The latter two visits were lengthy ones and included long discussions with Castro, who gave Karol broad access to the revolution's leaders and records. The result was *Guerrillas in Power*, a book published in April 1970, and consisting of a critical appraisal of Castro's first ten years in power.



Rene Dumont

Castro's infatuation with foreign technical experts had led him to entertain many. The Belgian agronomist and sociologist Michel Gutelman, French economist Charles Bettelheim, French agronomist Andres Voisin, Chilean economist Jacques Chonchol, and British livestock expert Thomas Preston are but a few who have contributed their expertise to promote the success of the revolution. Some, like Voisin, abstained from direct criticism of Castro's policies and thus gained admission to the revolution's pantheon of heroes; others, like Preston, were more forthcoming with their opinions and were made to suffer Castro's ire. None, however, managed to trigger Castro's wrath as did Dumont and Karol. Although the prime minister indirectly acknowl-



K. E. Karol converses with Fidel Castro in 1967.

edged the validity of their arguments by initiating reforms in direct response to their criticisms, he personally unleashed a propaganda campaign designed to discredit them, even going so far as to make the ludicrous accusation that they were agents of the CIA.

Part of Castro's extreme irritation stemmed from the fact that the latest books by Dumont and Karol were published early in 1970, just as production statistics were indicating that the heavily propagandized goal of ten million tons of sugar, on which Castro had staked the "honor of the revolution," would not be achieved. As he admitted later, the campaign for the ten million caused serious dislocation in other sectors of the economy, detracting markedly from the significant achievement of having produced by far the largest sugar harvest in Cuba's history. Despite his sensitivity, however, Castro recognized that the time had come when far-reaching changes were clearly in order.

Cuba: The Militarized Society

Both Dumont and Karol had criticized Castro for his militarization of the economy and of

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society in general. Because the armed forces constituted a ready source of disciplined labor, Castro frequently used troops for nonmilitary activities. The practice broadened gradually until some 100,000 of the military were used in the 1970 sugar harvest. In addition, troops were employed in road building, dam construction, land clearing, and other tasks generally geared to aid the economy; officers were placed in many top administrative positions throughout the government. The military establishment even began to absorb the educational system, and by 1970 all technological institutes and some secondary schools were under the control of the Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry (MINFAR).

Following the publication of Dumont's and Karol's books, however, efforts were made to halt the process of militarization on the surface at least. Major Belarmino Castilla Mas, for example, a MINFAR vice minister who was named minister of education in July 1970, has abandoned his uniform for civilian garb, and his rank is frequently dropped when his name appears in the press. The same is true of Major Jose Ramon Fernandez Alvarez, former MINFAR vice minister for training who now functions as Castilla's deputy. In addition, in late 1970 MINFAR's vice ministry for military technological training was shifted entirely to the Ministry of Education (MINED). Although these changes seemed to be removing the education function from MINFAR, in effect they guaranteed that all secondary education would take on a military character. In April 1971, the MINED-sponsored National Congress on Education and Culture called for the creation of a student militia at basic secondary schools and in the youth movement. Such units had already been formed at the universities, and inasmuch as military training is regularly given at the preuniversity level, the militarization process in the educational system is continuing.

The practice of naming military men to key important administrative posts has also continued. When the new Ministry of Merchant Marine and Ports was formed in August 1970,

Militarization: The Cuban View

In December 1970, a Uruguayan publication presented an interview with Pelegrin Torras, head of the international economic organizations section of the Cuban National Commission for Economic and Scientific-Technical Collaboration. The interview was conducted by three journalists from the Cuban Government's press agency and included the following:

Question: You know that one criticism that has been made by a certain individual, not very favorable to Cuba, is that the economy is becoming militarized. During the 1970 sugar harvest, the system of command posts was used. It has been said that this system will not be used during the 1971 harvest. What is your view on this matter?

Answer: The command posts were not actually based on a military organization as their name suggests. It is my understanding that this is why Fidel Castro suggested that their name be changed to Provincial Administrations of Agriculture.... With regard to the alleged militarization of the economy, I should like to make a statement. The fact that many of our leading officials holding important governmental posts are military men is no proof that our economy and country are militarized. Actually, the conditions under which the Cuban revolution has had to develop since its victory, with the constant threat of aggression from the North American imperialists, have made it necessary for the leaders, the first-ranking political cadres, to remain in the Revolutionary Armed Forces simply to guarantee the nation's defenses. And these cadres, which under different circumstances would not have been in the armed forces, belong to ranks on the highest political level, those with proven loyalty to the revolution, the true leaders of the revolution. But that is not a sign of militarization; it originates from a particular situation in which our revolutionary process had to develop.

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Major Angel Joel Chaveco Hernandez was appointed to head it. The Cubans state that this practice is not militarization, claiming that appointees are selected because of their managerial ability, not their military status. The appointees allegedly maintain no formal ties with the military establishment while performing nonmilitary duties. Nevertheless, as of mid-1971, ten of the government's 22 ministerial posts were held by military officers.

Castro: The Personality Cult

Dumont and Karol also challenged Castro's proclivity for reserving all major decisions and many minor ones for himself. Dumont described him as a man "with a personal power insufficiently held in check." Castro seems supremely self-confident in a variety of technical fields not normally related to political life, and he has unhesitatingly made decisions that sometimes run counter to the advice of technical experts with many years of experience. In May 1969, for example, Castro made an unscheduled address to the closing session of the Congress of the Animal Science Institute in Havana in order to attack, on technical grounds, the reports and theses presented by several foreign experts who had dared to criticize his interference in the operations of the institute. He is also reported to have replaced Lieutenant Orlando Borrego as minister of the sugar industry in 1968 because Borrego stated his belief that the ten million-ton goal for the 1970 sugar harvest, which by that time had attained a political significance in excess of its economic importance, could not be met.

Nevertheless, following the demoralizing speech on 26 July 1970, in which he admitted the many problems plaguing the country, Castro adopted several measures aimed at defusing the accusation that he was perpetuating a "personality cult." His speeches, except for a few of nationwide or international importance, were no longer broadcast over national radio and television. Whereas they previously had automatically received full textual presentation in the press,

they began to appear in greatly reduced format in editorial reviews or in a series of brief excerpts. His picture was used less frequently in the press and in January and February 1971, when several multipage articles in the party daily newspaper detailed three of Castro's frequent visits to the provinces, his picture did not appear once, despite heavy photographic coverage during the trips. To give the appearance of "collective leadership" in the decision-making process, Castro surrounded himself with members of the Political Bureau, the cabinet, and the appropriate government agencies when chairing such events as the National Food Industry Plenum and the Havana Provincial Light Industry Plenum.

As befitting a man of Castro's colossal ego, however, this de-emphasis was short-lived. By mid-April 1971, he had resumed his normal rate of exposure and pace of activities. In a period of a little more than two weeks Castro gave six lengthy speeches, five of which received full radio and television coverage. Moreover, the 3 May 1971 issue of the party newspaper, which carried the full text of his 30 April and 1 May speeches, broke all records as to the number of copies printed and distributed.

In his 26th of July speech last year, Castro called for a separation of the duties of party officials from those of administrators, again an outgrowth of the criticism from Dumont and Karol. As a hint that he might relinquish a portion of his authority, he indicated that a Bureau of Social Production would be formed within the party and on a par with its Political Bureau. This was followed by a spate of rumors that he would step down from his administrative post of prime minister, turning it over to "old" Communist and Minister without Portfolio Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, and devote himself primarily to his duties as party first secretary. Although Castro may have seriously entertained such thoughts briefly in the depressing period following the end of the harvest, he probably recognized that to give way to Rodriguez, presumably the man most suited for the job, would be to surrender a degree of

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authority that eventually might cost him the control of the power structure.

Fidel Castro on Dumont and Karol

"...Soviet aid has been for us a decisive factor. There are some who are not pleased that we recognize this: filthy hack liberals prancing about the world, charlatans who never had to face one case, let alone the problems of a whole nation, who never had to see and suffer the poverty, the wretchedness of the whole nation. There are many from Rome and Paris who can construct hypothetical and imaginary worlds. Some of them live very well for they are simple agents of the CIA and the others are idiots...."

Fidel Castro, 22 April 1970

Such a radical transfer of power has failed to materialize, and the possibility of Castro voluntarily loosening his grip on the reins seems more remote now than ever. Neither has there been anything more heard about the formation of the Bureau of Social Production. The creation of such a mechanism, unless Castro dominated it as he now does the Political Bureau, would have removed from his control all economic planning and determination of priorities and would have undercut his position as prime minister.

Power to the People

Castro's critics also faulted him for providing no formal mechanism for channeling the demands of the people to the upper echelons of government. They observed that the governmental structure was monolithic with all authority originating at the top.

Although Castro had for years looked upon his direct contact with the masses during his frequent trips around the island as the most fundamental form of democracy, he apparently recognized the validity of the criticism and instituted a

campaign of "democratization" in the government agencies, labor unions, and mass organizations. Workers' councils were ordered set up through popular elections by secret ballot in all mills, factories, shops, and other work centers to establish a means of two-way communications between the administrator and the workers. The workers' councils are not only supposed to function in an advisory capacity to assist the administrator in the operation of the work center, but also to perform regulatory and punitive tasks as well. The councils, for example, decide the distribution of major household appliances and bicycles on a basis of job performance and need. This was a partial concession to criticism from Dumont, who called for the reintroduction of material incentives for workers. They also adjudicate violations of the antivagrancy law. In addition, they apparently will play a key role in arranging for the construction and distribution of housing for employees of their respective work centers.

The process of "democratization," with its popular elections and secret ballots, spread to the labor unions, and even the government-controlled organizations for youth and students used it when they were reorganized in December 1970 and early 1971. In most cases, however, "democratization" consisted of offering a slate of preselected candidates whose political credentials had already been carefully scrutinized; voters then approved or disapproved of each candidate. The slate normally contained more names than there were positions to be filled. Thus the elections had "losers," a situation that helped to create the impression that the voters actually had a choice of candidates. In a few centers naive party officials, lacking adequate guidance from above, conducted free elections that resulted in the victory of individuals outspoken in their criticism of the regime. In such cases, the elections were nullified by officials at the next higher party level.

Castro characteristically has continued to prefer a much more direct form of communication with the workers. In a series of exhaustive

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sessions with various segments of industry in late 1970 and early 1971, he met with worker representatives in face-to-face discussions of local problems and possible methods of solving them. This type of "democracy" may have helped to improve Castro's image, but it did little to overcome the basic problems facing the regime.

Conclusion

The realization in May 1970 that the "battle of the ten million" was lost and the subsequent disclosure of the impact that the "battle" had had on the rest of the economy were crushing blows to Castro. His "*mea culpa*" speech on 26 July last year, in which he bluntly acknowledged the seriousness of his political and economic problems, shocked and demoralized the Cuban people. His rhetorical and ambiguous offer to resign, followed by his call for the formation at the highest political level of a special body to decide economic priorities, with its implication that he would yield a significant degree of power, suggest that Castro, who is remarkably well attuned to the mood of the people, may have suffered a crisis of confidence. His withdrawal from the limelight for several months, a period spent in close contact with the masses, probably was a time of reassessment of himself, his methods, and his goals.

Castro emerged in mid-April 1971, however, having weathered the crisis much as he has weathered others in the past. His basic goals and his methods of achieving them remain fundamentally unchanged. Although he may attempt to maintain a facade of certain reforms such as demilitarization, democratization, and collective leadership, he will continue to rule for the most part just as he has in the past, considering Cuba his personal fiefdom.

Certain modest changes have already been effected and others will be made. A new administrative layer called the district has been created between the regional government and the municipality to provide the middle-level coordination and leadership that the province-oriented regional

Raul Alonso Olive

To discredit Rene Dumont, the Cuban Ministry of the Interior presented in February 1971 a television program devoted to an expose of alleged CIA agent Raul Alonso Olive, a Cuban agronomist who, prior to his arrest in late 1969, had met with Dumont and had



provided the Frenchman with some of the statistics on which he based his criticism of the government's agricultural policies. Following the television program, Dumont said that he had met with Olive at the suggestion of the Cuban Government and that a government representative was present during these meetings. He denied the implication that he had been consorting with a "CIA agent."

government has failed to give. This system may slightly improve the lot of the consumer by facilitating the distribution of the limited supply of goods and services and by satisfying basic community needs. Also promising, from the standpoint of productivity, is the appearance of more foreign advisers and technicians to provide vitally needed technical and administrative guidance and assistance.

Fundamental changes, such as a realignment of the power structure or shifts in political or economic priorities, however, are highly unlikely, barring Castro's physical incapacitation. Although Castro has shown a willingness to discuss prospective economic advances in much longer range terms—20, 25, or 30 years or more—than he has used in the past, he still meddles deeply in day-to-day economic matters and has retained his tendency to promise far more than he can deliver. His recent pledge to achieve a production rate of 100,000 homes per year by 1975 solely through the use of "surplus labor" (i.e., using laborers

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Heberto Padilla on Dumont and Karol

To further discredit Dumont and Karol, the Cuban Ministry of the Interior had poet Heberto Padilla, detained incommunicado for more than a month following his arrest in March 1971, insert in his self-criticism these remarks: "I talked to too many foreigners. For example, I talked with K. S. Karol, the Polish-French writer-journalist. I made pompous analyses of the Cuban political situation for Karol. I always spoke to him with a defeatist spirit, with a bitter counterrevolutionary attitude toward the Cuban revolution. And Karol was a man who wanted to hear such things because Karol is an embittered man, a man in exile from his country. In Paris, Karol wanted to hear such things. He heard them and he collected them. The same thing occurred with the old French counterrevolutionary agronomist Rene Dumont.... I spoke outrageously to Dumont and Karol, who slandered the revolution in their writings." Padilla described both Karol and Dumont as agents of the CIA.

who are presently underemployed or who "voluntarily" extend their work day) fits into this cate-

gory and suggests that his failure to achieve the promised annual production rate of ten million tons of sugar by 1970 has taught him little. The continuation of this type of interference in national economic activity bodes ill for improved economic performance. In turn, continued economic stagnation means continued popular discontent and the latter will result in further repression.

The promulgation of the antivagrancy law last April, the arrest and persecution of poet Heberto Padilla in March and April, and the institution of compulsory universal identification documentation last month testify to the government's continued readiness to resort to further measures of repression and population control. The Padilla case, which was used as a platform from which to denounce Dumont and Karol, also demonstrates Castro's personal sensitivity to criticism and typifies the lack of sincerity that has characterized his efforts to remedy the deep-rooted deficiencies that inspired the critiques. A readiness to use repression and an unwillingness to undertake basic remedial measures constitute Castro's attitude toward the current domestic situation; the remonstrations of his critics have fallen on deaf ears.

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